

A Study of Africa.

A BLANK book could tell no more than is accurately known of Africa's history. Of Egypt much is written. Its pyramids, temples, obelisks, mausoleums, crypts and subterranean vaults are beginning to be studied. But for Africa as a continent or as a people, the silent sphinx is emblematic. The native has heard no history and never tells of any. He keeps no records.

If vast empires and kingdoms ever flourished, there is left no trace to tell the tale; if civilizations or institutions ever held sway there, no one knows of them; if gigantic enterprises and undertakings have ever been made, no objective remnant remains. Here and there some curious ruins—mysterious and colossal, seeming to tell a wild and weird story; but not even a shadow flits among them to remind of former life. All is silent, dark, grave-like.

Explorers have penetrated many sections and brought back marvelous reports of their discoveries; but they could only tell of what they saw on the surface. No fairy land could be more beautiful as far as nature can work her charming wonders. "Man alone is vile." He is the earth-child.—*Mission Studies*.

FIRST READING.—SYSTEMS OF RELIGION.

The intelligent African will tell you that among his people evil speaking, lying, hatred, disobedience to parents, as well as theft and murder, were all known to be sin, before they knew aught of Europeans or their teaching. This, however, is only among the more advanced of the African tribes, and we think it may be safely asserted that theft, falsehood and deceit, licentiousness, gluttony and murder, hatred, revenge and superstition are universal characteristics of the pagan tribes of Africa. This deplorable state is the natural result of their systems of religion—*fetichism and devil-worship*.

The primitive African faith seems to be that there is one Almighty Maker of heaven and earth; who, having made the world, has left it entirely to the mercy of evil spirits or demons; hence the imagined necessity for fetiches to keep off these evil spirits.

A fetich may be any object in which the gods convey their power, either to protect or defend the possessor. Human hair, finger nails, precious stones, roots of trees, relics of the dead, and all sorts of odds and ends, put in a pouch.

Fetiches are to be seen everywhere, and at all times, worn on the person, hung on fruit trees, carried, used not only as amulets, but worshipped. The abject slavery of the natives to their fetiches is pitiable. The worshipper does not love his god, but fears him. Human life counts for naught at their religious festivals and feasts.

Witchcraft, in its worst forms, is the universal plague of the African tribes. The witchcraft which attends fetichism produces more deaths in Africa than all other causes combined. Every one who dies has become "bewitched," and the question arises, "Who bewitched him?" The suspected party is subjected to trial by fire or hot water, and the horrors of the Inquisition are multiplied a hundred fold. Living and dying, they are the slaves of debasing and distressing fears.

SECOND READING.—MOHAMMEDANISM.

Schweinfurth said, "The banner of Islam is the banner of blood." It sanctions polygamy and fosters slavery. The one redeeming feature of Mohammedanism is that the Koran prohibits intemperance.

It is true that Mohammedanism claims sixty millions of the people of Africa, and that forty millions of Mohammedans place North Africa next to India, numerically, as a stronghold of Islam; yet "Islam in Africa is quite other than Islam in Asia; its bigotry racial rather than theological, its sword struck from its hand by the European partition of Africa, and itself a waning force."

God has still further lessened its political power by putting both heathen and Moslems under the control of British South Africa and French North Africa, "until from the Christian churches of each region, missions are reaching toward the heart of the continent."

"The success actually attained in this single century since Protestant missions permanently entered Africa already surpasses the happiest hopes of Carey, Coke, Johnson, or Moffat."

THIRD READING.—SLAVERY.

From time immemorial, slavery has existed in Africa among the natives, the result of intertribal warfare, the conquered tribes always being held as slaves.

The export trade, as it is called, commenced about the beginning of the sixteenth century. It was first carried on by the Portuguese, but all nations seem to have engaged in it.

About 1824 the English Government enacted a law declaring the slave-trade piracy, and as the moral and religious tone of the world advanced other Christian nations, recognizing the iniquity of slavery, retired from the traffic.

Richard Burton says that slaves were collected like ivories throughout the length and breadth of the land, and driven down to the coast to be sold. It has been estimated that in the course of three centuries over forty millions of human beings were forced from this continent into foreign servitude, while thousands upon thousands of lives were sacrificed in the weary march of the slave gang, or in the crowded ships. Iron or wooden yokes put on the neck bound the slaves together for the march. They were kept chained together in large gangs, food was thrown among them as to cattle, the fighting and scrambling for it often resulted in broken bones and cruel wounds. The lash was never out of the slave driver's hands. Children were torn from their mothers and thrown into the bush, an aged parent was clubbed while his children looked mutely on, and any who became too feeble to walk were put to death, thus escaping the horrors of the "middle passage."

We grieve to state that these cruelties are not of the past only. The most appalling atrocities are still committed by Arab and native slave raiders and slave dealers, and will only end with the suppression of Africa's internal slave trade—what Drummond calls "the heart disease of Africa."

Mr. Heli Chatelain, well known as author of the African articles in the Century Cyclopaedia of Names, member of several geographical societies, and author of a grammar of Kimbundu, has formulated a plan for the extinction of Africa's internal slave trade. This plan, called the "Philfrican Liberators' League," is largely based upon the Brussels Act which was formulated by the most representative congress of the Christian and Mohammedan States that ever assembled, having been convened by the King of the Belgians, at the request of Great Britain, in answer to a petition of the British and Foreign Anti-slavery Society.

The Act wisely declares that the best means to extinguish the slave-trade, and slavery itself, are: